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ISSN - 2277 - 078X  
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Journal of Humanities,  
Social Sciences  
and Creative Arts

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## REVISITING SECOND-HAND CLOTHING: MARKET FOR CLOTHING AND TEXTILE PRACTITIONERS IN YORUBA LAND NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Increased smuggling of second-hand clothing into Nigerian market, has negatively affected the consumption of locally-produced clothes, the cultural value of modest dressing and the *pass me down* clothing culture. The study argued that *pass me down* clothing can be regarded as internal second hand clothing. This study focused on revisiting internal second hand clothing as new marketing opportunity for clothing and textile practitioners in Yoruba land. The study combined literature from secondary sources, personal observations, images and interview with consumers of clothing items as sources of information. The information gathered are used to propose a model for internal second hand clothing trade. The study revealed a recycling of *pass me down* second hand clothes as a new market for local clothing and textile practitioners.

**Keywords:** Second hand clothes, clothing, textile, recycle, Yoruba

### INTRODUCTION

The global trade in Second Hand Clothing (SHC), is worth more than \$1billion each year creating employment opportunities in receiving countries -transporting, cleaning/washing clothes, repairing, re-styling etc and it provides low cost clothing for people living in poverty (Baden and Barber, 2005). For Nigerians living in poverty, second hand clothing usually referred to as *okrika* has been widely-patronized. Cast off clothes in Europe and America given to charity are exported to poverty-stricken Africans, who otherwise, cannot afford new outfits (Mathiason, 2004). Though the second hand clothing is cheap, it is not necessarily hygienic (Olori, 2005). This is because the clothes are unwashed, unsterilized, dis-

played mostly on mats and sometimes on hangers and emits offensive odour, while consumers select their choices. Nigerian government set prohibition on importation of textiles and clothing materials especially obscene articles (World Trade Organization, 1998). These prohibitions are for health, safety and moral reasons. These dresses have styles that are revealing, which are morally-unaccepted in the society. These are seen as offensive, indecent or disgusting in the society. Secondly, interview with consumers especially the elites and Nigerians in diaspora who traveled back home have asserted that second-hand clothing is an avenue for developed countries to solve their environmental problem of waste, thus classifying Nigeria as a *dumping ground* for *mixed rags* with a glorified name *second hand clothing*. In spite of the

ban, SHC, have continued to find its way into the ever-growing *bend down* boutique popularly called *okrika* market, located in major cities, and towns in Nigeria (Olori, 2006). It is rather unfortunate that government ban on imported smuggled second-hand clothing aimed at protecting the local industries did not rub-off well on the local clothing and textile industries due to smuggling activities. This has created a serious threat to the local clothing and textiles industries.

### ***Historical antecedents of Nigerian clothing culture during and after the military rule***

Traditional textiles have been produced in Nigeria for many years. The textile manufacturing establishments started in 1950s. During this period, it was financially difficult for individuals to establish textile factories. Hence the first set of factories was established by regional governments as deliberate programmes to promote industrial development (RMRDC, 2002). This gave birth to the establishment of Kaduna Textile Mill in 1956, Nigerian Textile Mill in 1962, followed by Aba Textile Mill and Bendel Mill Limited in Asaba (MBendi, 2006). These companies convert locally available raw materials (mainly cotton) for the production of finished textiles (MBendi, 2006). Today, the sector has developed to incorporate fibre production, spinning, weaving, knitting, lace and embroidery, carpet production, dyeing, printing and finishing. Between 60 and 70% of the raw materials used in the industries are sourced for locally and the industry is labour intensive with little mechanization (Intercontinental Bank PLC, 2007). The sector provides employment of an estimate of 150,000 Nigerians excluding the thousands who are directly employed in the cottage sector of the

industry such as tie-dye/batik industries.

The history of prolonged military rule left the nation's civil institutions in ruin, the economy grossly mismanaged and the individual values completely misplaced, thus preventing Nigeria from attaining its full potentials (Olukoyun, 2004). This has resulted into the wide spread of poverty. Poverty and economic mismanagement in the country have pushed millions of poor Nigerians to trade in second hand clothing usually referred to as *okrika* or *bosikona* meaning *hide in a corner*. Women, widows, self-sponsored students, sacked and retrenched workers take to the trade because it requires little start up capital with a quick profit almost immediately (SAIIA, 2007). According to Ijeoma, the President of Smugglers' Association, "it is hard to smuggle goods into the country, but because of poverty and hunger, people are ready to walk miles carrying bales of clothing in the day or night (SAIIA, 2007). It can however be deduced that the root of smuggling activities is poverty and hunger.

### ***Effects of second-hand clothing on Nigerian culture***

"Aesthetic deals with the philosophy of beauty as well as with the standards of value in judging art and other aspects of human life and culture. Among the Yoruba, beautiful is that which possess *ewa*. This means *well made* or *well done*, being pleasant to behold, eliciting admiration, honour and respect. To the Yoruba, beauty (*ewa*) has two realities, the outer, (*ewa ode*), and the inner (*ewa inu*). The outer beauty has to do with the surface quality of things or outward appearance, while the inner refers to the intrinsic worth of things. In man, *ewa inu* is frequently implied in word or character. The most important element in the Yoruba conception of human beauty is *ewa inu* or character. It is

believed that good character is the very stuff, which makes life a joy, because not only does it please God, it also endears one to the hearts of all men. On the other hand, *ewa ode* is relative and varies from person to person (beauty is in the eye of the beholder)" (Lawal, 1974). However, among the Yoruba, it is unanimously accepted that good character is beauty (*iwa lewa*) and must be reflected in dressing.

It is impossible to wear clothes without transmitting social signals. Every costume tells a story about the wearer- thus an adage among the Yoruba *irinisi ni isonolojo* meaning "the way you are dressed is the way you will be addressed; ones appearance determines the degree of respect one receives." Thus, clothing is to perform a function of comfort, modest, and adornment. In an article written by Gurel in Gurel and Beeson (1979), she identified four major theories of clothing. These are the modesty/Mosaic theory, the immodest theory, the protective and adornment theories.

"The foundation of modesty theory comes from the Book of Genesis, the Bible (Genesis 3: 1-21). The theory is attributed to Moses, hence the Mosaic theory. This theory implies that costume originated because of an innate sense of shame that led man to adopt a covering for his naked body.

The proponents of immodest theory are James Laver (a costume historian and curator of Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England) and Lawrence Langner (late Director of the New York Theatre Guild). They believed that the main purpose of clothing is to stimulate sexual interest causing attention to parts of the body that were covered. Laver believed that clothes are

meant to draw attention to various erogenous bodily areas; use as a sexual lure to call attention to parts of the body that were covered. This is however contrary to the societal acceptance of functions of clothing among the Yoruba. The Yoruba frown at immodest dressing. This is because immodest use of clothing is believed to be an attribute to sexual harassment, rape, all manner of immoral and promiscuous behaviour. It is regarded as Western culture or way of dressing which needs not to be emulated or copied.

The protection theory is on the use of clothing as a protective covering from cold weather and other environmental/physical hazard such as protection from insect bites, thorns and psychological protection from evil eye while the fourth theory is for decoration or adornment. This could be in the form of body painting, tattooing, scarification and mutilation" (Gurel, 1979). Thus, clothing is to perform a function of comfort, provide modesty, and adornment. Gurel emphasises that most of the functions of clothing are to satisfy culturally-created needs because their expression varies enormously from one society to the next.

According to Webb- Lupo, (1999), clothing is a medium of socio-cultural expression, a form of communication. It sends all kinds of messages: who we are, who we want to be, where we come from and among adults especially in the Western world, subtle signals of sexual orientation. Among the Yoruba, clothing is a means of non-verbal communication which provides information about the wearer, including personality, economic status, religion, character, even the nature or events attended by the wearer. The Yoruba believe that the human body is a mass of gender signals. Every curve of flesh, each bulge and contour transmits its basic signals

to the eyes of on lookers. The female breast, buttocks, hips, thighs, waist, male chest, broad shoulders etc., all are potentially arousing to the opposite sex. If their messages are to be reduced, admired, and valued as beautiful with dignity and honour, then they must be enveloped by the use of modest wearing of clothes.

Among the Yoruba, an immodest dressed person causes embarrassment to on lookers, sending various non-verbal questions, signals and thoughts in the mind of on lookers such as *why do you have to seduce an individual? Does he/she think he/she is valued?* he/she must be from a broken home, *asewo* (meaning prostitute), *aja igboro* (public dog), *animasaun* ("gives freely"), *awobowa* (skin covers character), *aju lari, eso o denu* (superficial beauty), etc. "An immodest person may be the best dancer, singer, scholar, drummer, artist etc in town, but his/her inner ugliness prevent people from appreciating the quality of anything he/she does" (Lawal, 1974). Consequently, modest dressing among the Yoruba is held in high esteem.

Smuggled second-hand clothing from Europe and America come in various immodest/revealing styles and *see through* fabrics' thereby exposing Nigerian consumers to all manner of *fashionable styles*, which are not acceptable in Yoruba society. From personal observation, the teenagers and the young adults are the major consumers who patronises revealing styles or see through smuggled second hand clothing. Unfortunately, embracing Western mode of dressing under the umbrella of civilisation among the adolescent and young adults has watered down the dignity and honour accorded to modest dressing.

### ***Extinction of Pass me down clothing culture***

Among the Yoruba, used clothes that are outgrown are transferred from one member of the family to the other. For instance, from a father to the son, mother to daughter or from one sibling to the other. This is usually referred to as *pass me down*. At times *pass me down* clothes can be given to members of extended family, friends or relations. It could be argued that *pass me down clothes* are *internal second hand clothing*. Regrettably, the influx of smuggled second hand clothings into the country has gradually resulted into the extinction of *pass me down* clothing culture within and among families.

The focus of this paper is revisiting internal second-hand clothing as a new marketing opportunity for clothing and textile practitioners in Yoruba land. The study combined literature from secondary sources, personal observations, images and interview with consumers of clothing items as sources of information. Background information was gathered from journals, books, newspaper, and the web. The consumers were contacted and interviewed at the local open markets and supermarkets. The interview gave the opportunity for the consumers to recount on their decision, perception and attitude towards smuggled second-hand clothing. The information gathered are used to propose a model for internal second-hand clothing trade.

### ***Transcript of the interview with consumers***

- ◆ *Second-hand clothing has really saved me a lot of money and worries of clothing for every member of my family.*
- ◆ *There may be likelihood of skin disease as a result of using second-hand clothing, however, it is affordable for the poor.*
- ◆ *My pension is not paid regularly, so I don't have*

money to buy new clothes. I have to patronise second-hand clothing, though I feel I might contact skin disease.

- ◆ *Second hand clothing has saved me a lot of money. Even if second-hand clothing causes skin infection, I don't care, I will treat myself of any infectious skin disease using herbal medicine.*
- ◆ *The scene of second-hand clothing trade is disgusting in our society. White-men send these clothes to Nigeria and other developing countries as a medium to get rid of their waste and preserve their environment.*
- ◆ *I hate second-hand clothing because its not hygienic to put on a clothe that has been used by others. You're not sure of skin disease an unknown person has which can be contagious.*
- ◆ *Most Nigerians have a mentality that imported items are better than indigenous goods, irrespective of its quality. This might be true but not in all cases.*
- ◆ *As for second-hand clothing, some Nigerians prefer these clothes because of perception of putting on designers wears.*
- ◆ *Second-hand clothing has led to the extinction of pass-me down clothing culture. I doubt if pass-me down clothing culture could be rekindled*
- ◆ *I prefer pass me down clothes to second-hand clothing because its traceable to a known person. I can confidently put on pass me down clothes without any fear of infection.*
- ◆ *Second-hand clothing has horrible odour, its highly absurd in our society. The odour from second-hand clothing gives me catarrh.*
- ◆ *Can you imagine buying second-hand pants, bras and under-garments. Its so ridiculous.*

Based on the interview with consumers, indeed consumers who cannot afford new clothing benefit from purchase of cheap smuggled second hand clothing. It is important to mention that there is a mutual benefit to both receiving and exporting countries

of second hand clothing. On the part of the exporting countries, it's a way of getting rid of textile waste in other to save energy and conserve their environment, while the consumers of the receiving country benefit from the cheap price of the goods. The question is who benefit more, and secondly what are the consequences of non sterilized second hand clothing on the health of individual consumer and the environment in general?

Its interesting to note the online comments of some Nigerian consumers of second-hand clothing published by Nairaland, (2005): *"I used to a long time ago before I started working, but I don't do so anymore, don't think it's nice to patronise second-hand clothes because u don't know what infection the person had, don't really think its safe"*. *"Generally speaking, why do you have to buy second-hand clothes when you can generally get new and authentic clothes for the price of second -hand. Second-hand clothes are generally for the motherless and children suffering in the third world, at least that was the message passed in the leaflet drop into our house through the doorpost"*. *"What a silly and careless statement you just said, who says second-hand clothes are for the third world alone? Even in the U.K., there are numerous second-hand stores. Europeans at times buy their clothing from this store"*. *Will advise people not to buy it, save money to buy one new cloth than ten used ones"*. *"You will see people buying second-hand underwear. Second hand underwear, that's not advisable...not too hygienic to my knowledge"*. *"I do not understand what you guys are saying about infection stuff. Well, I used to be a fan of it, and bet you, if I see a lovely second-hand wear, I'd go for it. Although it's been a very long time I patronise such"*. *"Kinni? (what?) Second-hand cloth is good in such a way that it saves you money, which can be diverted to gari, sugar and kuli-kuli. Who say infection dey [sic] for cloth? Even if it is there, just rely on DETOL to bath and wash"* (Nairaland, 2005). It can, however, be argued that some consumers are aware of

health risk through the use of second-hand clothing because of the benefit of cheap price, surprisingly other consumers are not concerned about the health issue. Consumer education, however, becomes pertinent. This is because, consumer education plays a key role in consumer empowerment,

helping consumers gain the skills, right attitudes and knowledge they need to be able to gear the choices they make as consumers to their economic interest and to protect their health and safety" (Brennan and Ritters, 2004).



**Plate 1: Consumers selecting clothes in a second hand market.**

**Source: (Author) Researchers, 2010**





**Plate 2: Non-sterilized used bra on display at Second Hand Market.**

**Source: Author**

***The situation of second-hand clothing in Europe and America - General Views***

"Among the Europeans, unwanted clothes are often donated to charity stores. Charity stores are institutions of retail outlets selling mainly second-hand donated goods to raise funds for their parent charities" (Association of Charity Shops, [n.d.]). "Retail outlets for second -hand goods fall into two categories; commercial enterprises and charitable organizations" (Government of South Australia, 2006). These charity shops include: Oxfam, Salvation Army, British Heart Foundation, Bread for the City, Butter wick Hospice Care, Age Con-

cern, etc. The unwanted goods that are being donated include: ladies, men and children's clothing, books, toys, ornaments, kitchen ware, video, music, computer games, furnishing, electrical appliances, bridal wear, etc (Association of Charity Shops, [n.d.]). "Charity shops benefit from exemption of corporation tax on profits, a zero VAT rating on the sale of donated goods and 80% relief is funded by central Government and 20% rate relief is available at the discretion of local authorities" (Association of Charity Shops, [n.d.]).



**Plate 3: Photograph of a collection centre for second hand clothing items in Southampton, England**

**Source: Author**

"Many people shop in charity shops for various reasons; some because they want to support the activities of the parent charity, some because of the environmental and ethical benefits of the re-use of goods rather than buying completely new goods, or simply dumping used goods, while others because the prices charged for the items are often lower than other shops" (Association of Charity Shops, [n.d.]). Charity stores provide services in an atmosphere of dignity and respect to consumers. "If a charity shop doesn't manage to sell the products in the shop or have donations not suitable for sale in the shop, it would be shipped for use in third world countries and sold to local merchants" (Baden and Barber, 2005; Mathiason, 2004).

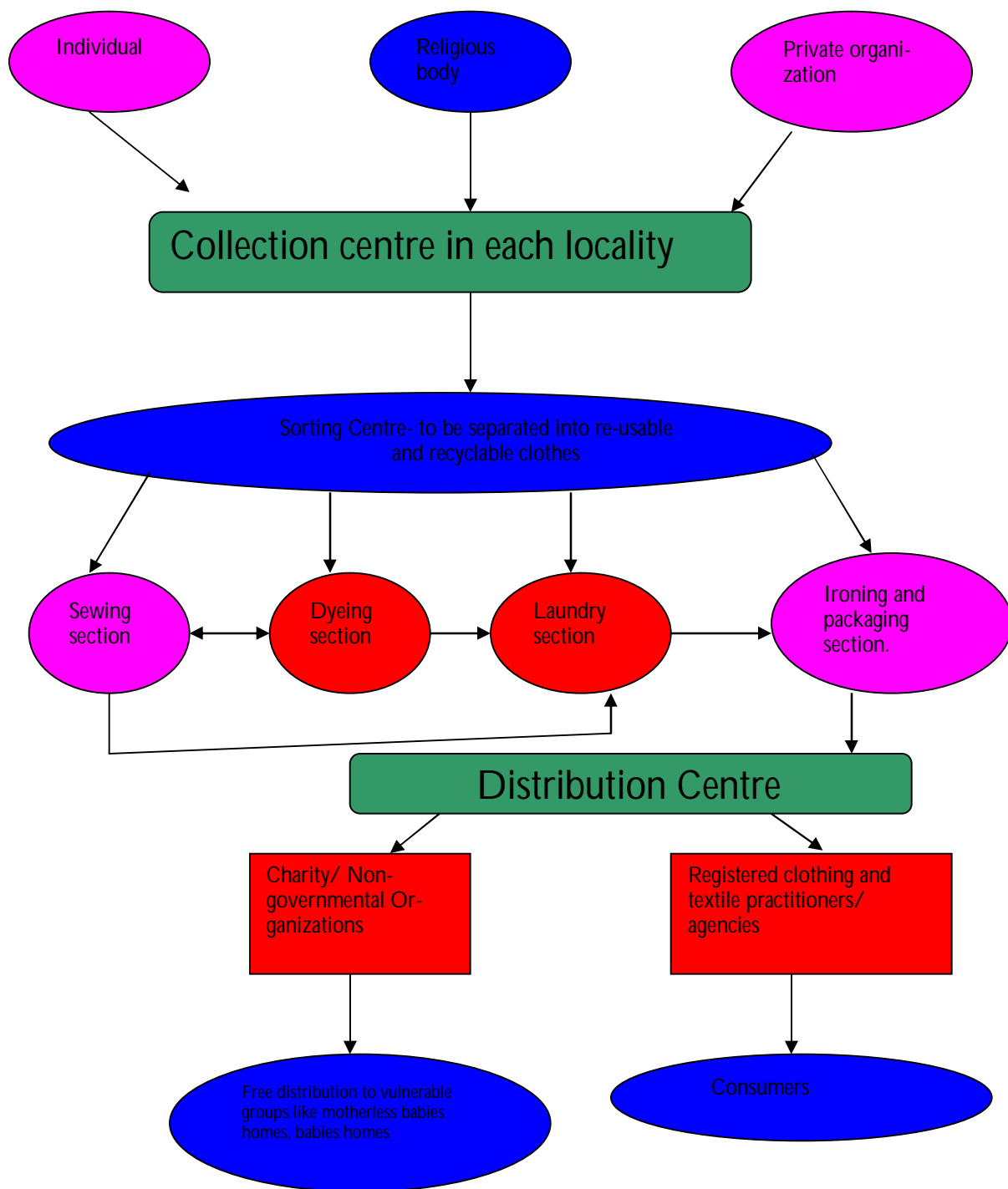
"European consumers are more informed, educated and empowered to make right decisions in purchase of any article" (Brennan and Ritters, 2004). Unlike Nigerian consumers of second-hand clothing, most European consumers have the required skill, knowledge and attitude to protect their health and safety. According to the Department of Health, Government of Australia publication (2006), "there are no specific law that requires second-hand dealers to clean goods before they are offered for sale to the public. The department further informed that, there is a small risk of infection from second hand clothing, which may result in a risk to health if they are not thoroughly cleaned before use. These infections include: scabies, body lice, public lice, head lice, bed bugs, Tinea and Impetigo (school sores)". In a video clip



published by Zonbie (2008), it was revealed that several customers are upset about learning that a popular second hand children's clothing store in Europe (The Children's Place) was shut-down because of an infectious skin infection. It can however be deduced that European consumers of second-hand clothing will not compromise cheap price with their health and safety. In this context, if second-hand clothing could cause infectious diseases among European consumers who live in an environment that is disease-controlled, then the likelihood of cross-transmission of infectious diseases among Nigerian consumers of second-hand clothing cannot be over-ruled especially because second-hand clothing is poorly managed among the smugglers. It will be appreciated if individual health researchers or organizations like World Health Organization could conduct a study on the health risk of second-hand clothing among consumers in third world countries. It is important to mention that this charitable act would be much appreciated if European charity organizations collaborate with charity organizations in Nigeria and other third world countries that will efficiently manage the goods.

Imported second hand clothing has negatively affected Nigerian local textile industries. No nation will want to lose its cul-

ture. This paper proposes that *pass me down/internal second hand clothing* be revisited as a strategy to create new market for clothing and textile practitioners by adopting *Recycling Strategy*. This means converting pass me down/internal second-hand clothes into re-useable materials. This will require education and co-operation of government agencies, Non-governmental organizations, private organisations, religious leaders, and the entire populace. The government will need to create recycling centres in all local government areas where people can donate old clothes that are still usable. This should be sorted into categories based on their usability and condition. The clothes may need to be repaired, sterilised, re-styled, washed, dry-clean, ironed, or dyed and neatly packed. Clothing and textile practitioners can be trained/re-trained to perform this task. This can then be given to charity organizations for free distribution to vulnerable groups such as leper's colony, motherless babies homes etc, or sold to consumers at a price cheaper than the smuggled second hand clothing. This will not only preserve the culture; health wise, the clothes will be safe and hygienic to use by prospective consumers. It will also create avenue for employment, poverty alleviation, and a long-term effect on reduction in smuggled second hand clothing.



**Fig. 1: Proposed model for Marketing and Distribution of internal second-hand clothing**  
**Source: Author**

## CONCLUSION

Indigenous and large textile and clothing industries in Nigeria operates in a turbulent environment of increasing global competition. Nigerian clothing and textile industry has experience massive decline in employment opportunities and closure of many of the industries as a result of unfavourable internal and external policy conditions. Consequently the industries have not been able to reach its maximum growth potential. However, base on the poor management of smuggled second hand clothing trade, the environmental impact assessment of the possible threat of smuggled second-hand clothing should be made public to Nigerians. This will likely be an eye opener to Nigerians and consumers of smuggled second-hand clothing on the health and safety risk in consuming non-sterilized, smuggled second-hand clothing and may likely embrace the proposed model for internal second hand clothing.

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*(Manuscript received: 25th, February, 2010; accepted: 30th June, 2010).*